by Kevin Savetz

muvee Technologies muvee autoProducer 5

- **muvee autoProducer 5**
- $74.95
- muvee Technologies
- www.muvee.com

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You bought a video camera and digicam with the best of intentions: You wanted to create DVDs from your home videos to share and treasure forever. Then reality hit: Creating those videos is time-consuming. muvee autoProducer 5 takes the drudgery out of creating something that's watchable from your video clips and digital photos. Just feed the app a folder of images, select one of 24 video styles, choose a music file, and click Make Muvee.

In a few minutes, the app produces your video by syncing scene transitions to the music and doing a reasonable job of selecting the most interesting bits of your raw video. The resulting videos are cute enough; they'll impress Grandma and make a slideshow that's worth watching. The built-in video styles range from frenetic music video to mellow sepia. Additional Style Packs ($15 to $20) are available for download.

After watching several videos, you may notice that output is somewhat repetitious. Videos can seem as if a computer generated them using a heavy dose of Ken Burns' pan-and-zoom effect, which Apple's iMovie helped popularize. With some extra effort, you can customize videos by selecting areas in a photo to focus on using the magicSpot feature, rearranging clips, and adding a title screen and credits.

Your chosen music track replaces the video's auto track, so you'll lose important sounds, such as birthday party squeals, in the final product. Version 5 adds the ability to replace scenes in a finished video, although the UI for doing so is convoluted. You can burn the finished movie to DVD and save it in numerous formats, including DivX and QuickTime.

autoProducer won't overwhelm you with features, which might be a blessing for many, but users who want greater control may quickly outgrow the program. For simply creating video slideshows and sharing pictures without wasting a weekend doing it, autoProducer does the job. ▲

SnapStream Media Beyond TV 4

beyond tv 4
Recorded Shows
Monday, January 23, 11:08 AM
Disk Space Used
All
Regular TV: 11 hours left
NUMB3RS - Man Hunt Sat 1/21
Law & Order: Criminal Intent - Grow Sat 1/21
Alias - Masquerade Sat 1/21
Star Trek: Enterprise - Home Sat 1/21
Star Trek: Enterprise - Home Sat 1/21
Stargate Atlantis - The Eye Sat 1/21
Ed, Edd 'n Eddy - Rambling Ed; Home-Cooked Ed Sat 1/21
My Parents' House Sat 1/21
Mission: Organization Sat 1/21
MythBusters - Breakstep Bridge Sat 1/21
Alias - "Masquerade" - While tracking Khasinau, Sydney encounters her ex-lover (Peter Berg); Jack sees a CIA psychiatrist (Patricia Wettig) for help in dealing with the revelation that his wife may be alive. Starring Jennifer Garner, Michael Vartan, Bradley Cooper, Merrin Dungey, Carl Lumbly. (MPEG-2)

- **Beyond TV 4**
- $69.99 standalone
- SnapStream Media
- www.snapstream.com

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When I set up a PC-based PVR for my living room two years ago, the two Windows-based solutions were SageTV and Beyond TV. Beyond TV had a slick interface but couldn't handle more than one tuner at once, so I opted for SageTV. Today, Beyond TV 4 removes that limitation and adds so many other features it would now be my choice for a Windows-based PVR.

Setup was blissfully easy. Using a Hauppauge card, the installation process let me avoid Hauppauge's usual driver installation process, which can be frustrating to the point of madness. The drivers on the Beyond TV disc simply worked the first try.

In addition to supporting multiple tuners (Beyond TV's site shows six- and 10-tuner systems), the app can now record HDTV broadcasts. There are no HDTV channels in my area, but programs I recorded from cable TV looked and sounded great. The app's UI is clean and fast with helpful navigational sound effects; it's more pleasant and professional than SageTV's UI.

A ShowSqueeze feature can compress a video to DivX or other formats to save drive space. This can work automatically or manually. A SmartSkip feature lets you skip multiple commercials with one click; it worked perfectly for me most of the time. Neither feature is available with SageTV; although there are hacks for commercial skipping, they're not easy to use. Beyond TV also lets you set recordings via the Web, so you can schedule a program from work, for example. You can also play and pause FM .

I tested the program on a Sempron 2400+ PC with 512MB of RAM, a Radeon 8500, and a Hauppauge WinTV-PVR-150 tuner card. The only problem I experienced with Beyond TV was some sluggishness as the app downloaded program guide data. Thankfully, guide downloads don't happen frequently.

SnapStream's optional FireFly remote control ($50) controls the PC via RF with a USB receiver connected to the PC. The FireFly has an intuitive interface, but it's tied to the PC, so you can't use it to turn on the television or control other A/V components. ▲

CPU Ranking: 0 = Absolutely Worthless CPU CPU 2.5 = Absolutely Average CPU CPU CPU CPU 5 = Absolutely Perfect